

REMARKS

This Response is submitted in reply to the Office Action dated February 23, 2006, issued in connection with the above-identified application. Presently, claims 1, 2, 5 and 7-13 are pending in the patent application. With this Response, claims 1 and 7-9 have been amended. No new matter has been introduced by any amendments made to the claims. Thus, entry and favorable reconsideration are respectfully requested.

I. Response To Claim Rejections

Claims 1, 2, 7-11 and 13 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Godefroid et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,697,840, hereafter “Godefroid”), Appelman (U.S. Patent No. 6,750,881, hereafter “Appelman”) and an article by Gene Steinberg (“Sams Teach Yourself America Online in 10 Minutes,” hereafter “Steinberg”). Claims 5 and 12 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Godefroid and Steinberg and further in view of DeSimone et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,212,548, hereafter “DeSimone”). The Applicants respectfully traverse the rejections noted above for the following reasons.

The present invention, as recited in claims 1 and 7-9, is directed to an apparatus, method, computer medium and program for managing a virtual space containing a user space. More specifically, an owner of the user space generates and stores lists of users that are denied and granted access to the user space. For example, every time a user attempts to visit the owner’s user space, a management server checks a blacklist list and a members list generated by the owner. The blacklist is a list of unwelcome users and the members list is a list of users that are always welcome. The user is either denied or granted access to the user space based on his or her presence on the lists. It is also possible for a user to be added to the blacklist in virtual real time by the owner. (i.e., when a user visits the user space). This feature of the present invention is not believed to be disclosed, taught or suggested by the cited prior art, and is fully supported by the Applicants’ disclosure (see, Applicants’ disclosure, page 9).

Godefroid is directed to a presence awareness in a collaborative system that enables a user to set awareness policies. As correctly noted by the Examiner, Godefroid fails to at least teach or suggest “the storage means or the determining means” of the present invention (see, Office Action, page 2). Accordingly, independent claims 1 and 7-9 (as amended) are clearly distinguishable over Godefroid.

In the Office Action, the Examiner relies on Appelman and Steinberg for teaching or suggesting the above features of the present invention (see, Office Action, pages 3-4). However, after a detailed review of Appelman and Steinberg, the Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's interpretation of the references.

Appelman teaches or suggests a real time notification system that tracks, for each user, the logon status of selected co-users via definable "buddy lists." A user is able to create many separate buddy lists according to preferences, and the buddy lists can be updated or created whenever necessary (see, Appelman, Abstract). In the Office Action, the Examiner relies on the use of preferences in Appelman for rendering obvious the use of lists in the present invention. However, there appears to be a clear difference between the use of preferences in Appelman and the use of lists in the present invention.

In Appelman, the preferences are related to preventing or allowing a user to be added to buddy lists (*e.g.*, "*allow all members to add me to their lists/invitations; and block all members from adding me to their lists/invitations.*") (see, Appelman, col. 5, lines 10-48). Thus, the preferences are related to preventing another user from adding you (a user) to a list, not for preventing another user from accessing a user space that you (a user) own or control. To the contrary, in the present invention a user is either denied or granted access to an owner's user space based on his or her presence on the lists generated by the owner (*i.e.*, blacklist or members list).

Additionally, after a detailed review of Steinberg and DeSimone, the references do not appear to overcome the deficiencies noted above in either Godefroid or Appelman to render obvious any claims of the present invention. In particular, Steinberg and DeSimone fail to teach or suggest managing a virtual space containing a user space, wherein an owner of the user space generates and stores lists of users that are denied and granted access to the user space. Therefore, even if it were proper for one of ordinary skill in the art to combine the teachings of Godefroid, Appelman, Steinberg and DeSimone, the combination still would not teach or suggest all the features recited in claims 1 and 7-9 (as amended).

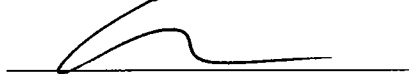
For at least these reasons, independent claims 1 and 7-9 are believed to be distinguished over the cited prior art. Likewise, dependent claims 2, 5 and 10-13 are also believed to be distinguishable over the cited prior art based on their respective dependencies from claims 1 and 9.

II. Conclusion

In light of the above, the Applicants submit that claims 1, 2, 5 and 7-13 are patentable over the prior art of record. Accordingly, the Applicants respectfully request that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case. If any additional fees are due in connection with this application as a whole, the Commissioner is authorized to deduct such fees from deposit account no. 02-1818.

Respectfully submitted,

BY



Thomas C. Basso
Reg. No. 46,541
Cust. No. 29175

Dated: April 26, 2006